DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 431 580 RC 022 027

AUTHOR	Nadler, Relly; Luckner, John
TITLE	Facilitating Defining Moments for Others.
INSTITUTION	Association for Experiential Education, Boulder, CO.
PUB DATE	1998-11-00
NOTE	4p.; In: Selected Monographs from the Association for Experiential Education International Conference (26th, Incline Village, Nevada, November 5-9, 1998); see RC 022 022.
AVAILABLE FROM	AEE, 2305 Canyon Blvd., Suite 100, Boulder, CO 80302-5651; Tel: 303-440-8844 ($2.50).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Discovery Learning; *Experiential Learning; Learning Experience; Learning Strategies; *Personality Development; *Psychoeducational Methods; Self Concept; Self Disclosure (Individuals); Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Facilitators; Psychological Influences; *Self Awareness

ABSTRACT

Defining moments are situations that ask us to step forward in irreversible courses of action that shape our personal or professional identities. These moments of truth happen quickly and reveal something new about ourselves that had been hidden or only partially known. In a process known as "edgework," experiential educators and therapists invite participants outside their comfort zone into an area of the unknown and the unpredictable. The edge of the comfort zone is a place of imbalance where learning, insights, and self-knowledge occur and where defining moments may happen. Psychological conditions that facilitate learning and create a ripe environment for the emergence of defining moments include hope, effort, constructive level of anxiety, trust, perceived risk, and sense of unpredictability. The skills of a facilitator can shape and support defining moments. The facilitator must attend to the emotional needs of students and clients by establishing learning environments that are physically and emotionally safe. Simultaneously, the facilitator should establish rapport and honor participants' right to choose their level of involvement. Pitfalls for the facilitator to avoid are listed, and facilitator actions before, during, and after the learning experience are outlined. (SV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Ref# C101098

November 1998

FACILITATING DEFINING MOMENTS FOR OTHERS

Relly Nadler and John Luckner

ED 431 580

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Juliet Bonnell

2A

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

RC 022027

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Ref# C101098

November 1998

FACILITATING DEFINING MOMENTS FOR OTHERS

Relly Nadler and John Luckner

Sue, the instructor on a corporate training course, observes the CEO criticizing and snapping at members of his staff. She thinks this kind of behavior is counter productive to the stated goals of the training: teamwork and peak performance. She knows if she doesn't bring it up, no one else will and the course will be a failure.

Steve, one of the facilitators working at a ropes course, decides to challenge Joan, a student whom he senses has been holding herself back throughout the day. When she arrives at the trapeze leap he encourages her and verbally pushes her to accept feeling uncomfortable and to keep moving. Steve is correct in his perceptions. Joan jumps off the platform, grabs the bar and is elated that she completed the event, overcoming her worst fears. She's indebted to Steve for believing in her even more than she believed in herself.

After looking at the map, Ruth thinks James is leading the group down the wrong trail. He has been very forceful and influential within the group. She decides to confront him and the group. It turns out she's right and saves them hours traveling in the wrong direction. Ruth is very glad she spoke up and reflects on her father telling her to "trust her gut" on decisions she has to make.

Each of these scenarios reflect what we call *defining moments*. They are situations that ask us to step forward in irreversible courses of action that shape our personal and professional identities (Badaracco, 1998). These moments of truth happen quickly, and as experiential educator John Dewey (1932) noted, instances such as these form, reveal and test ourselves.

In this monograph we will explore:

- What are defining moments?
- Why are defining moments important to experiential educators, therapists, and trainers?
- What are the ingredients to facilitate and promote defining moments for our participants?

What are defining moments?

Each of us has had a variety of defining moments in our life. These are moments when significant learning about ourselves becomes the foundation or building blocks of our character. They are the instances that have affirmed us, encouraged, supported, pushed and taken us to a new level. Through these instances we reveal hidden capabilities to ourselves which serve as a foundation for future successes.

Defining moments are the snap shots or windows to who we really are. These are moments when and where significant learning about ourselves becomes cemented in our minds and demonstrated to others. Our true character shines through. Our potential, capabilities, essence, or substance in these moments get tested, stretched, formed, massaged or reconfigured. We reveal something new about ourselves that has been hidden or only partially known to us. "Defining" here means moments that embody, characterize, crystallize, exemplify, mold, create, or sharpen who we really are. Moments are the responses, reactions, experiences, situations, crossroads, or choice points that happen quickly, sometimes in a minute, 30 minutes or longer.

Why are defining moments important to experiential educators, therapists, and trainers?

As experiential educators, therapists, and trainers we often invite individuals to challenge themselves by actively participating in experiences that are unfamiliar, frightening, exhilarating, and outside their normal range of comfort. In essence, participants are placed at the border of the circle of comfort and new territory, a process we refer to as Edgework (Luckner & Nadler, 1997). People are on the edge of the known and the unknown, the comfortable and the uncomfortable, the predictable and the unpredictable, the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Compared to other learning disciplines, such as traditional classrooms, therapy, and corporate training sessions, experiential educators, therapists, and trainers arguably *own* this edge. No other discipline we know of can get close to putting people on this edge. This is the place where breakthroughs, learning, insights, potentials, and self-knowledge occur more frequently than back in the circle of comfort. On the edge is also where many of our defining moments occur. When people are outside their comfort zone something meaningful may happen that they would simply not allow to occur inside their comfort zone.

In addition to placing people outside their normal range of comfort, there are other factors that are beneficial to consider in order to enhance the behavior change and learning processes. We refer to these factors as *change conditions* (Luckner & Nadler, 1997). Attention to each of these elements may facilitate learning and also may create a ripe environment for defining moments to emerge. The change conditions include:

- Hope — desire to fulfill needs, dissolve problems, heal wounds.
- Effort — physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral actions. Concentration, attention, and focusing are part of effort.
- Constructive level of anxiety — confusion, dissonance, frustration, stress.
- Trust — reliance dependence on self, leader, and others.
- Perception of risk or danger — perceived risk rather than actual risk.
- Sense of the unknown or unpredictable — awe or mystery of what is about to happen.

Each of these conditions has the potential to create an imbalance in people, where new learning or a defining moment can occur. The role of the educator, therapist, or trainer is to consider each of these factors in order to create the right mix for each participant. This allows the defining moment to sneak in behind the defenses, then we as facilitators can become the midwives, supporting and encouraging the birthing process for this new identity emerging from within.

RC 022027

When we view individuals with whom we work as self-regulating learners, who are actively involved in making sense of new information and experiences, we realize that our processing skills may play an important role in promoting their learning and development. Our primary goals are to establish safe, active learning environments, raise questions, and invite participants to share their opinions, solutions, reflections and strategies with others. Similar to a jeweler knowing where to cut the diamond, we want to demonstrate the precision of asking the right question. The jeweler knows how to push, pull and/or support while artistically designing beautiful jewelry. We as facilitators must recognize how to push, pull, and/or support, and how to revisit the learning while artistically designing defining moments. Consequently, if we want to create change that makes a difference, we need to provide different activities and new experiences while simultaneously finding ways to facilitate the defining moments of our students and clients before they slip away.

What are the ingredients to facilitate and promote defining moments for participants?

It's easy to miss an individual's defining moments. Therefore, to facilitate and promote defining moments we want to be aware of some pitfalls. Specific ways we can miss defining moments include:

- Being self absorbed in our own issues or agenda.
- Being in a state of perpetual action and not scheduling enough time for reflection and discussion.
- Not listening or responding to our inner wisdom and doing only what is easy.
- Deciding this moment is not that important to us or to others.
- Being blind to others' moments at the edge.

In addition to avoiding the above mentioned pitfalls, we can undertake various actions to enhance the defining moments of others. First and foremost is the importance of attending to the emotional needs of our students and clients. Recent research suggests that emotions are the first screen for all information received (e.g., Goleman, 1995). Consequently, it is essential to establish learning environments that are physically and emotionally safe. Simultaneously, the value of establishing rapport and honoring participants' rights to choose their level of involvement should not be underestimated. In addition, attention to the actions listed below can serve as a guide for what to do before, during and after the learning experience.

Pre defining moment

- Build a trusting relationship.
- Maintain an awareness of the change conditions to bring people to the Edge.
- Know and understand the person's values: what is important for him or her?
- Know and understand his or her individual goals.
- Learn about some of their past successes to be able to incorporate them in your discussion when processing.
- Be empathic and supportive to their struggles.
- Be prepared to spotlight successes, talent, effort, and small wins.

At the defining moment

- Be aware of self and others.
- Be proactive.
- Encourage, push, pull, or give affirming touches.
- Tie in to past successes.
- Align yourself with their values and goals.
- Celebrate the success.
- Ask good processing questions. Specific examples include:
  - How did you make that happen?
  - What were the ingredients for success?
  - How did others see you?
  - How will you continue this learning?

After the defining moment

- Talk more about their successes, talent, effort, and small wins.
- Reinforce the learning and new self story.
- Tie in to past successes and future strivings.
- Talk about next steps.
- Push the edge on the next defining moment.

Summary

In this short monograph we have discussed the importance of defining moments. We explained that defining moments are the snap shots or windows to who we really are. They are the critical times that affirm, encourage, support, push, and take us to new levels. These are the moments when our potential, capabilities, essence, and character get tested, stretched, formed, massaged, and reconfigured. We suggested that as experiential educators, therapists, and trainers we provide individuals with new experiences that often are unfamiliar, frightening, exhilarating, and challenging. Thus, a wonderful opportunity is created for participants to have defining moments that may produce changes that make a difference in their lives. We identified pitfalls to avoid and provided suggestions for enhancing defining moments. Now it's up to you to take your spotlight and focus on the moments that will give people the character, foundation, and motivation to do their own dance in the light.

References

Badaracco, J.L. (1998). The discipline of building character. *Harvard Business Review*, March/April, 115-124.

Dewey, J. (1932). *Ethics*. New York: Henry Holt & Co.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.

Luckner, J.L. & Nadler, R.S. (1997). *Processing the experience: Strategies to enhance and generalize learning*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing.

Authors' Note: *We would like to acknowledge and thank the reviewers of this monograph. Their comments and suggestions helped us improve this publication.*

©1998 by The Association for Experiential Education. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the copyright owner. Additional copies of this monograph are available from the Association for Experiential Education. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the positions or policy of AEE.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE